Transmedia Storytelling: Narrative worlds, emerging technologies, and global audiences

W1 What is Transmedia Storytelling?

◊ Transmedia Storytelling is the art of designing, sharing, and experiencing a cohesive story experience across multiple traditional and digital delivery platforms - for entertainment, marketing, or social change.
◊ A transmedia story is one in which separate story elements of a larger narrative can be experienced by many different audiences, via a range of technology platforms.
◊ Three main aspects to a transmedia storytelling strategy are story, technology, and audience.
◊ These will each be explored in more detail within each module of the course, but some main points to remember are as follows...

Story

◊ A story is a singular tale where certain events occur. A storyworld is the larger framework in which individual stories can exist. The storyworld contains a set of 'rules' for the world that defines common connection points or defining characteristics between individual stories.
◊ he storyworld is the spine from which infinite new stories or aspects of the main narrative can be created, shared and added to. All separate complete stories in themselves, but all following the same rules of reality that make them clearly belong to a larger, more complex, common central world.
◊ Stories belonging to a larger storyworld do not necessarily have to be experienced sequentially. Each can reveal different aspects of the storyworld so the audience can piece together a rich image or understanding the more stories they engage with.

Technology

◊ Different technologies are used in transmedia storytelling to:
    1. Disseminate the story to a range of audiences around the world
    2. Tell the story in different ways - inherently linked to the functions and abilities of different technologies
    3. Engage audiences in the act of storytelling and creation.
◊ Digital technologies have greatly increased the opportunities to tell stories in different ways, and to reach a much more diverse global audience.
◊ Technological platforms used in storytelling include movies, books, comics, toys, games, interactive web experiences, social media communities, mobile devices, theme parks, and even augmented and virtual reality.

Audience

◊ Every story needs someone to hear it, see it, experience it, evolve it, share and perpetuate it.
◊ Audiences of transmedia stories have many different entry points into a larger storyworld, such as books, movies, games, websites, etc.
◊ A person can choose the complexity and depth of their engagement depending upon how much effort and time they wish to spend exploring different transmedia story elements.
◊ One audience member may experience a completely different aspect of a storyworld than another their standalone experience is a complete story in itself, but it may also draw them into exploring other related story elements via different technological platforms.
◊ Transmedia audiences are often active in sharing or even creating different aspects or stories within the larger storyworld.

Why is it important to create a storyworld to be at the centre of a transmedia storytelling strategy?
◊ It enables many different stories to be created that feel like they belong to the same universe.
◊ It establishes the rules (or 'conceptual hooks') within the larger ficitonal world surrounding the original story.
◊ It enables an audience to build a deeper understanding of the larger storyworld the more they engage with different story elements within it.

What are the advantages of using different technologies to tell stories in a transmedia approach?
◊ The characteristics of different technologies allows elements of the story to be told in different ways.
◊ Certain technologies enable the audience to participate in and contribute to the storyworld.
◊ Having different storytelling options allows an audience to access what they like, when they like, in ways that have the most meaning for them.
◊ Internet based technologies can enable more people around the world to engage with a story.

Important thing to remember about a transmedia audience;
◊ They can be very diverse in terms of their location, interests, and level of engagement in a storyworld.
◊ They have many entry points into a storyworld - you cannot predict which part of a story presented on different platforms they may encounter first.
◊ They may want to actively participate in dicussion or contribute to the storyworld via different social networks and communities.

Transmedia Storytelling 101 – by Henry Jenkins

1. Transmedia storytelling represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes it own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story. So, for example, in The Matrix franchise, key bits of information are conveyed through three live action films, a series of animated shorts, two collections of comic book stories, and several video games. There is no one single source or ur-text where one can turn to gain all of the information needed to comprehend the Matrix universe.

2. Transmedia storytelling reflects the economics of media consolidation or what industry observers call "synergy." Modern media companies are horizontally integrated - that is, they hold interests across a range of what were once distinct media industries. A media conglomerate has an incentive to spread its brand or expand its franchises across as many different media platforms as possible. Consider, for example, the comic books published in advance of the release of such films as Batman Begins and Superman Returns by DC (owned by Warner Brothers, the studio that released these films). These comics provided back-story which enhanced the viewer's experience of the film even as they also help to publicize the forthcoming release (thus blurring the line between marketing and entertainment). The current configuration of the entertainment industry makes transmedia expansion an economic imperative, yet the most gifted transmedia artists also surf these marketplace pressures to create a more expansive and immersive story than would have been possible otherwise.

3. Most often, transmedia stories are based not on individual characters or specific plots but rather complex fictional worlds which can sustain multiple interrelated characters and their stories. This process of world-building encourages an encyclopedic impulse in both readers and writers. We are drawn to master what can be known about a world which always expands beyond our grasp. This is a very different pleasure than we associate with the closure found in most classically constructed narratives, where we expect to leave the theatre knowing everything that is required to make sense of a particular story.

4. Extensions may serve a variety of different functions. For example, the BBC used radio dramas to maintain audience interest in Doctor Who during almost a decade during which no new television episodes were produced. The extension may provide insight into the characters and their motivations (as in the case of websites surrounding Dawson's Creek and Veronica Mars which reproduced the imaginary correspondence or journals of their feature characters), may flesh out aspects of the fictional world (as in the web version of the Daily Planet published each week by DC comics during the run of its 52 series to "report" on the events occurring across its superhero universe), or may bridge between events depicted in a series of sequels (as in the animated series - The Clone Wars - which was aired on the Cartoon Network to bridge over a lapse in time between Star Wars II and III). The extension may add a greater sense of realism to the fiction as a whole (as occurs when fake documents and time lines were produced for the website associated with The Blair Witch Project or in a different sense, the documentary films and cd-roms produced by James Cameron to provide historical context for Titanic).

5. Transmedia storytelling practices may expand the potential market for a property by creating different points of entry for different audience segments. So, for example, Marvel produces comic books which tell the Spider-man story in ways that they think will be particularly attractive to female (a romance comic, Mary Jane Loves Spiderman) or younger readers (coloring book or picture book versions of the classic comicbook stories). Similarly, the strategy may work to draw viewers who are comfortable in a particular medium to experiment with alternative media platforms (as in the development of a Desperate Housewives game designed to attract older female consumers into gaming).

6. Ideally, each individual episode must be accessible on its own terms even as it makes a unique contribution to the narrative system as a whole. Game designer Neil Young coined the term, "additive comprehension," to refer to the ways that each new texts adds a new piece of information which forces us to revise our understanding of the fiction as a whole. His example was the addition of an image of an origami unicorn to the director's cut edition of Bladerunner, an element which raised questions about whether the protagonist might be a replicant. Transmedia producers have found it difficult to achieve the delicate balance between creating stories which make sense to first time viewers and building in elements which enhance the experience of people reading across multiple media.

7. Because transmedia storytelling requires a high degree of coordination across the different media sectors, it has so far worked best either in independent projects where the same artist shapes the story across all of the media involved or in projects where strong collaboration (or co-creation) is encouraged across the different divisions of the same company. Most media franchises, however, are governed not by co-creation (which involves conceiving the property in transmedia terms from the outset) but rather licensing (where the story originates in one media and subsequent media remain subordinate to the original master text.)

8. Transmedia storytelling is the ideal aesthetic form for an era of collective intelligence. Pierre Levy coined the term, collective intelligence, to refer to new social structures that enable the production and circulation of knowledge within a networked society. Participants pool information and tap each others expertise as they work together to solve problems. Levy argues that art in an age of collective intelligence functions as a cultural attractor, drawing together like-minded individuals to form new knowledge communities. Transmedia narratives also function as textual activators - setting into motion the production, assessment, and archiving information. The ABC television drama, Lost, for example, flashed a dense map in the midst of one second season episode: fans digitized a freeze-frame of the image and put it on the web where together they extrapolated about what it might reveal

regarding the Hanso Corporation and its activities on the island. Transmedia storytelling expands what can be known about a particular fictional world while dispersing that information, insuring that no one consumer knows everything and insure that they must talk about the series with others (see, for example, the hundreds of different species featured in Pokemon or Yu-Gi-O). Consumers become hunters and gatherers moving back across the various narratives trying to stitch together a coherent picture from the dispersed information.

9. A transmedia text does not simply disperse information: it provides a set of roles and goals which readers can assume as they enact aspects of the story through their everyday life. We might see this performative dimension at play with the release of action figures which encourage children to construct their own stories about the fictional characters or costumes and role playing games which invite us to immerse ourselves in the world of the fiction. In the case of Star Wars, the Boba Fett action figure generated consumer interest in a character who had otherwise played a small role in the series, creating pressure for giving that character a larger plot function in future stories.

10. The encyclopedic ambitions of transmedia texts often results in what might be seen as gaps or excesses in the unfolding of the story: that is, they introduce potential plots which can not be fully told or extra details which hint at more than can be revealed. Readers, thus, have a strong incentive to continue to elaborate on these story elements, working them over through their speculations, until they take on a life of their own. Fan fiction can be seen as an unauthorized expansion of these media franchises into new directions which reflect the reader's desire to "fill in the gaps" they have discovered in the commercially produced material.

The anatomy of Story

Story, memory and meaning
◊ We remember things that happen to us in our lives by stripping away extraneous details, and condensing experiences into simplified narratives.
◊ When we connect what we learn from each of these episodic narratives in our own memories, important life lessons emerge – guiding the way we behave and live within our broader society.
◊ Our own life experiences have an emotional impact upon us. No matter who we are, we all have common emotional responses to different situations.
◊ Eliciting emotional responses in a story can therefore be used as a way to engage with diverse audiences in a similar manner, and communicate an important life lesson, or moral.

The Hero's Journey
◊ In his 1949 book about comparative mythology, "The Hero with a Thousand Faces", Joseph Campbell noted that most stories share the same structure. He called this structure the monomyth.
◊ Christopher Vogler distilled this monomyth into a series of simple steps called 'Stages of the hero's journey'. These simple steps form the basic structure for the majority of all stories told today.
  ◊ **The Ordinary World** - The hero character is established living in the ordinary everyday life. This sets a point of contrast for changes that are about to happen.
  ◊ **Call to adventure** - Something happens to disrupt the status quo in this world. The character is challenged in some way to create a sense of disruption or disturbance.
  ◊ **Refusal of the call** - The hero, faced with the challenge of the unknown or staying in their old life, usually fails to rise to the challenge. Instead, facing an internal dilemma about the need for change or stepping outside their comfort zone.
  ◊ **Meeting with the mentor** - Someone comes along who offers wisdom or advise and build a sense of confidence or responsibility within the hero. This guidance or insight motivates them to accept the challenge before them.
  ◊ **Crossing the threshold** - The hero leaves the comfort and familiarity of their ordinary world and steps into the unknown world of adventure.
  ◊ **Test, allies, enemies** - This world is usually full of the unfamiliar, full of wonder, challenges, and trials. The hero joins new friends along the way and will make enemies that further challenge them. Choices may be made that set things in motion that will test the hero and their resolve to the limit. All of these interactions lead the hero to their ultimate destination.
  ◊ **Approach the innermost cave** - The hero arrives at the location of the greatest challenge in the story. It is usually a stronghold of fear or evil, inside of which the goal of the adventure lies waiting.
  ◊ **Ordeal** - The hero's darkest hour. It seems that what they face is too strong and they will surely be defeated. The hero will often face death ot come so close to losing the battle, only to miraculously find a way to come back from the brink, to be reborn with new strength and resolve to triumph over the ultimate challenge.
  ◊ **Seizing the sword, reward** - Having overcome the great challengde of the story, the hero claims their reward. This is usually a treasure or some special knowlegde, and may not always be what they expect to find.
  ◊ **The road back** - Often caught in a moment of reflection, the hero realizes that they must excape the innermost cave and begin the journey back home.
  ◊ **Resurrection** - The hero crosse the threshold from the special adventure world back into their ordinary world. They are wiser and somehow transformed by their experience. They may often see the oridinary world in a new

light, appreciating things that they previously took for granted.
  ◊ **Return with the elixir** - Now home, the hero uses the treasure or knowlegde they gained from the adventure to benefit the ordinary world.
◊ The hero's journey depicts change – a life lesson that must be learned the hard way by undertaking a personal journey to reach a new understanding. By connecting to the emotive elements in such stories, the audience can undertake the journey with the hero, so that they too can learn from the moral of the story and relate it to their own experience.

Character archetypes

◊ In his book "The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Storytellers and Screenwriters", Christopher Vogler described the eight most common character archetypes appearing in most stories. An archetype is something that exhibits typical elements of certain personalities.
  ◊ **Hero** - The main protagonist who undertakes the trans-formative journey. They are usually self sacrificing and end up caring more about others than themselves.
  ◊ **Mentor** - A wise character, who shares wisdom, advise or artifacts with the hero to help them on their journey.
  ◊ **Treshold guardian** - Characters who confront or are an obstacle for the hero to overcome at various points of the journey. They don't necessarily oppose the hero or their quest, but they represent significant challenges that must be understood or overcome.
  ◊ **Herald** - A character who brings messages or knowledge in some form they can change the way the story travels.
  ◊ **Shapeshifters** - They are characters used in tent, a legend or motivation and not clearly nowhere, they may at different times appear to be against or in favor of your quest. They represent uncertainty.
  ◊ **Shadow** - This character is usually the main opposition to the hero. Where the hero is light and hope, the shadow is darkness and fear. They can also represent the darker side within the hero and ourselves. The hero will usually have to meet and overcome this character during the final stages of the story.
  ◊ **Ally** - An ally is someone who travels with the hero. Sharing their journey and enabling a level of personal interaction through which the audience can get to know the hero, their hopes and their fears. The Ally can also aid, hinder, or promote comic relief. They can also help to humanize and balance the hero.
  ◊ **Trickster** - This character is mischievous, humorous, and not afraid to bring a dose of reality and humility to other characters including the hero.
◊ Most stories contain several of these archetypes, that interact in specific stages of the hero's journey, but not all stories need to contain them all.
◊ Using character archetypes in combination with the stages of the hero's journey can help you structure your own stories.

The moral

◊ One of the most important elements of a story is its moral. All stories have an instructional purpose, and the moral is a lesson that can be learned through the transformative journey of the hero.
◊ The moral can usually be distilled into one simple core message that is designed to help provide a positive life lesson to the audience, and provide the context that defines the detail in all other elements within the story.
◊ Characters motivations are usually driven by the moral - highlighting the positive effects from heeding the moral, and the negative effects of ignoring it.
◊ The moral is usually revealed at the end of the hero's journey, as the hero changes status as a result from learning the central life lesson being told.
◊ The journey, characters, motivations and moral of the story also have a bearing upon how you choose to use engage different audiences, and therefore which technologies you use.
◊ True connection and engagement with an audience comes from our ability to personally relate to the moral of the story, through emotional connections between the characters and their experiences, and our own personal stories that guide our lives.

In a story everything needs to be motivated. If you know your central character, what they want, what they need, where they're trying to get to, what motivates them than the plot rights itself.

A storyworld consists of rules that apply in that reality. If the rules are broken than it isn't part of the world. Anything can be part of these rules and set the basic of understand this storyworld. From that you can make anything within that world.

Remember that the structure of your story is critical. To engage your audience, you need to take them on an emotional journey, with some kind of transformation for the hero because of a life lesson being learned. The audience needs to relate this transformation to their own experience.

The structure discussed above can also apply to marketing strategies, or campaigns for social change. Simply replace the hero in your story with members of the audience. What journey do you want them to go on, or what understanding do you want them to develop by engaging in your transmedia strategy?

What does 'character archetype' mean?
An exaggerated character type that is easily identifiable to an audience as aspects of themselves they need to emulate, refine, avoid, or improve.

The Power of Ideas

◊ One of the simplest models of thinking we can apply when we are creating new transmedia stories is conceptual blending. This means taking two seemingly unrelated ideas and merging them together to form something new.

◊ Six Word Stories are a useful way to help you develop the premise of your story.

◊ A premise in the idea generating process can be a simple statement which helps to frame your central story concept, and which can help you to see a pathway to the conclusion, like a headline in a newspaper article.

◊ You can create several six word stories while developing your own ideas. One that describes the theme, one that describes the emotional tone of your story, one that describes the main character and so on. It is a useful way of mapping out the essentials to ensure you don't get too lost in details at the start.

The purpose of this lesson is to give you some starting points for developing the content for your story. It is always a good idea to try to distil the main narrative of your story into a simple statement that you can refer to while you work. Using this as a guide, you can ensure that your story development stays focused. Your six word story, or series of six word stories, could help you define some specifics to flesh out some details of the hero's journey structure.

What best describes the process of conceptual blending in story development?
Bringing two or more seemingly unrelated ideas together to form something new.

How can six word stories be used for story development?
◊ To help develop a concise premise for the story.
◊ To help develop the motivation of a character.
◊ Several six word stories can be used to describe different elements of your larger story to map out essential points and avoid getting lost in too much detail.
◊ To place restrictions on expressing an idea to make it more focused and memorable.

What is the premise of a story?
A simple, short statement which helps to frame the central concept of the story.

Assignment
Make a contrast checklist for gap analysis;
Column 1 - Transmedia stories you have enjoyed and why they engaged you
Column 2 - Things you feel are missing as creative new stories

Reframing, Random Stimuli and Research

There are three useful tools that you can use to help you develop unpredictable and unusual stories. Such narratives are more memorable for audiences and help to engage them in your transmedia storyworld.

Reframing
◊ Throughout the history of storytelling there are patterns, and some forms of stories which are repeated. This was the basis of Joseph Campbell's monomyth as discussed in Module 1.
◊ Reframing stories can involve changing the place, time, characters or plot sequence.
◊ Can you take a familiar story structure, and change one or more of the above parameters to give it a new twist, or to let audiences experience the story from a new perspective?

Random stimuli
◊ Try to look at several random items, artefacts, or images. Can you create a story idea that links them together?
◊ By beginning with random associations, sometimes unusual or unexpected story ideas can emerge that you may not have been able to think of any other way.
◊ Random stimuli help us to avoid predictable pathways and habitual ways of creating when we are coming up with new ideas.
◊ The power of random selection is that it can help you to explore useful associations that would not emerge intentionally.

Research
◊ Try to keep a notebook in which you record your ideas that may help to inspire your story development - consider pictures from places you have travelled, objects that have special meaning for you, and inspiring quotes.
◊ Research places, items, customs or behaviours that might have an influence on your own storyworld. Can these be reframed in some way to inform your own narrative?
◊ Notebooks containing such research can also be a physical tool for random stimuli - as we turn over several pages, new connections can occur to us.

These tools give you a good starting point for thinking originally about your story ideas. They can also help you take a very famil-iar idea and evolve it into something new or unexpected. Try these ideas for yourself as you develop your own narrative for use in your transmedia storytelling strategy.

How would you describe using 're-framing' for developing a story idea?
Taking an existing story and changing the place, time, characters or plot to give it a new perspective.

Why is using 'random stimuli' useful when generating idead?
◊ It helps to avoid the mind thinking along predictable pathways and engaging in habitual methods of creation when coming up with new ideas.
◊ It can provide the basis for conceptual blending of two or more ideas to form a new one.
◊ It can help you come up with an initial idea if you get stuck.

How does arranging your working desktop or using a notebook help you develop your ideas?
◊ They can inform the random stimuli process by helping you connect different ideas together by seeing them in new contexts.
◊ Drawing and writing things down physically embeds information in memories differently than just using a computer.
◊ They enable you to easily refer to an record all of your research about your ideas.

Assignment
Take an existing story and re-frame it by changing the time, place, characters, and so on. Randomly select some personal images and include them into your story. And research using a real desktop or notebook ensuring that you have real images in your mix.

What is an idea?
Ideation, immersion, Interactivity --> What is the idea or story? The audience need to immerse themselves into the story and eventually interact to understand it even better.
Purpose, passion, perception --> What is the purpose? Is it told with passion? What is the perception?

Developing your Conceptual Story Idea with Content

The following five considerations will be useful in helping you to design such a strong and clear narrative to help guide your deci-sion making when crafting the finer details within your stories.

Focus
◊ You need to decide why you want to tell your story - what is its purpose? Do you want to relay a moral, to simply entertain, or maybe sell something?
◊ Keep this in mind at all times so that your reason for telling your story shapes how you tell your story.

Story structure
◊ There are several plot structures that you can draw upon to help plan the events of your story. These are well summarised in the blog post The 7 universal story plots that still entrance audiences. They all emphasis different aspects of the hero's jour-ney. They include 'Overcoming the monster', 'rags to riches', 'voyage and return', 'the quest', 'comedy', 'tragedy', and 'rebirth'.

Conversational style
◊ Create events and dialogue in your stories in a way that reflects how we really interact or speak with each other. This adds authenticity and makes it easier for people to relate to the event and characters in the story.

Consider multiple points of view
◊ Try telling your story from the point of view of different characters. How does this change the experience?
◊ You could also tell your story in the first, second or third person. This enables you to have the audience either removed from the immediate action, to be placed in the story themselves, or to be inside a character's head sharing their thoughts.

Connect your story to a larger storyworld
◊ You need to define the overarching events that in essence trigger the smaller more focused stories that you can tell using your transmedia strategy.
◊ The major events in this larger storyworld narrative, shape elements of each smaller story in the world in a similar way, giv-ing a sense of cohesion and strengthening the feeling the audience will have that the stories belong together.
◊ It is critical that you have a strong central narrative that guides the events that happen within the stories that emerge from your storyworld. Define this central narrative first before getting into too much detail.
◊ At each stage of your story development, pause and reflect whether the details you are creating in your story align to the premise of your overarching narrative. Keep the content of your stories focused on this alignment.
◊ Ensure that you test your story many times while you are developing it. Identify who your audience will be, and have them give you feedback on your ideas. You can also involve your audience in the creation of elements of the larger storyworld, as discussed in Module 3.

Working Creatively in Storyworlds by Using Constraints

◊   Constraints in storytelling can actually be very helpful when creating an individual story or designing a larger story-world. By understanding the limits you have to work within, you can focus your efforts to ensure that the story you create is the best fit for its intended purpose.

◊   There are several types of constraints that can positively guide your story development process.

Story structure

◊   Story structures such as the hero's journey are useful in giving you a constrained series of events from which to begin your story development. This way you do not have to start from scratch, but can modify the structure to suit your needs.

◊   This type of structure can also help you constrain the premise, plot or character actions in your story so they remain relevant.

Time

◊   How much time do you have to develop your story? Using your available time as a constraint will stop you from going into too much detail, or making your story too detailed or your storyworld too vast too quickly.

◊   Remember that if you invest your time in creating the central storyworld first, you can always gradually expand the number of stories within it as more time becomes available.

◊   How much time should your audience invest in your story? Asking an audience to invest too much time may deter them from engaging very deeply, while not providing enough depth may also alienate many potential new fans.

◊   How can you create different types of stories to cater to audience members who want to spend more or less time within your storyworld?

Technology formats

◊   What types of technology will you use to tell your story? See Module 5 for some ideas.

◊   What can be done with this technology? It is no use developing aspects of a story that can never be experienced because they is not compatible with the technology you have chosen to use.

◊   Find out the limits and potential of different technological platforms, and develop aspects of your story that will benefit

Skill levels

◊   What storytelling or technological skills do you currently posses?

◊   It is best to begin by working within your current skill levels. Start small, and develop new skills as you go to continue to expand the complexity of your storyworld and the technologies that you use to tell the story.

◊   What skill levels do your audience possess when it comes to using technologies? It is no use choosing a technology to tell your story and finding you are excluding people because they do not have the technology or skill to access it. A clever transmedia strategy will include a range of technologies to maximise the potential audience engagement.

Budget

◊   How much money do you have to develop your story?

◊   It is important to understand the resources at your disposal at the outset of your project development.

◊   This will determine the complexity of media production, the channels you use to disseminate the story, and the time you have to develop the ideas.

What is the difference between positive and negative constraints?

◊   Positive constraints can provide a framework within which you van develop an idea, while negative constraints inhibit your ability to develop an idea.

What are some possible positive constraints that van help you develop a story idea?

◊   The format of the media you will be telling the story through.

◊   The story styles of recognised story genres.

◊   The structure of a story (such as the Hero's Journey).